



Newsletter

Third Term, 2004



*Standard 7 Students After Completing Their National Exam:
(Left to right, back row) Kealeboga, Oye, Jack, Raymond, Onkabetse.
(Middle row) Amon, Gaolethoo, Goitseone, Temogo, Thatayaone.
(Front row) Kesego, Kabelo, Gaopalelwe.*

Update, December 2004

It is always the case that by the third term the boys have all settled down and behaviour is not a major problem. The fact remains however, that it was a difficult year, one which saw our most troublesome group to date finish their 3 years at Bana ba Metsi School. In review, we had numerous cases of theft, several boys who ran away, attempted vehicle theft, curfew violations, fighting, etc., etc. The completing group could best be described as a Maun gang when they were admitted in 2002. Most of them made it to the end, but not without much difficulty.

We had a total of 13 students writing their national Primary School Leaving Exam in October, 2004. The results were, on the surface, not that good with only 6 achieving a passing mark. But of these 6, two of them obtained a "B" pass, something we have never managed to do. Kudos go to Onkabetse and Goitseone for this. Looking at those students who did not pass, only 2 of them had a chance. And as I said above, they were a very demanding group so just getting them through I consider an accomplishment in itself. All of them now qualify to attend secondary school although only time will tell if they have the courage to do it. I am using the word courage because for a few of them it will no doubt be easier to slip back into their old habits of hanging around with the wrong crowd. It is one of our biggest challenges, teaching them to resist peer pressure, think for themselves and do what is right. While they are here it is easy for them to do this since they really have no choice. Once they leave here it is like a bird leaving the nest. They are on their own. And no matter how much talking we do, there are still a minority who don't manage.

So the term, and the year, ended without any major disasters. I was relieved and exhausted, but had to admit that, as much trouble as they gave us, there were several of the completing students who I would miss. Two boys in particular, Gaolethoo and Kealeboga, really turned their lives around. They were proper pains in the back side when they first arrived. In fact, they were both suspended at the beginning of their second year in the School. Not trusting them to go straight home and deliver the suspension letters to their parents we decided to drive them down to Maun, a distance of 450 km's. As they were leaving they had big smiles on their faces in the back seat of the car, waving like dignitaries to the rest of the boys. If I had had a surface to surface missile I would have been tempted to use it if not for the fact that one of the teachers was driving the car. After lots of counselling when they returned they actually seemed to understand that they were going to have a difficult life if they didn't change their ways. By the end of their second year they had climbed to the top of the ladder in terms of behaviour and never gave us any trouble.

There were 4 additions to our staff in September, 2004. Due to the untimely death of France Kushuka there was one vacancy for a teacher. This position was filled by Ruth Lephalo whose most impressive qualification was serving as a teacher in Botswana's largest prison in Mahalapye. Just what we need. She has proven to be very pleasant and cooperative, and seems to be settling in nicely. We also welcomed our 2 new volunteers, James Ledger from England and Thijs Penning from Holland. They have gotten off to a good start and seem to be happy to be here. I will include photos of them once I am sure they aren't going to bail out.



Ruth Lephalo

And last, but not least, Dave Bodington joined our staff. A trained engineer, he has been contracted, through his company Swift Engineering, to provide the students with vocational training and help with productive activities through the fabrication of steel and aluminium products. His speciality is aluminium boats. Our plan is to start raising more of our own money through these activities. Those of you who have been to Mohembo will be interested to know that Dave built the large ferry which takes vehicles across the Okavango River. He will also be invaluable to me in helping to keep everything functioning properly, something which up to now has fallen on my doorstep. During the initial stages of setting up the School



One of the many boats built by Dave

he had always been in the plans, but when the time came to start he wasn't available, nor was the money to pay his salary. During his first term at the School he helped to get all of our vehicles in good running order, helped with installations, taught one Standard 5 mathematics class, and was generally a handy guy to have around. Below is his impression of finally arriving at the School.

Having arrived at Bana ba Metsi, after following the 5-tonne Isuzu truck full of returning students, I was asked by Mr. Harpt, which sounded like a spur of the moment question, whether I would be willing to teach Standard 5 mathematics. I agreed. We then attended the staff meeting that dealt with the third term class allocations. Miss Lephalo, the new volunteers and I were introduced and the minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved. During my reading of the minutes, I found my name already put forward to teach a class of mathematics. This, I deduced, was a foregone conclusion before I was even employed at the School, and I realised that this is the attitude of the staff members of the School. All tasks at hand are presumed to be done by whoever may be passing by. There is a wonderful atmosphere among those that I have joined.

As for the students, well I was apprehensive to meet them in the classroom after the many stories that Mr. Harpt has related in previous newsletters. To my surprise I found that the more attention I paid to them and their work, the more attention they paid to what I had to pass on to them. The Standard 7's wrote their Exams only four weeks after I had started, but when Mr. Harpt and I dropped them off at their respective homes in Maun I found I had a lump in my throat. How else can I explain the nature of the work started, and the standards set, by Mr. Harpt nearly 5 years ago.

The main task I have at the School is to complete the engineering tasks that Mr. Harpt has not been able to fit into his rather busy schedule. This reminds me that I am the only other licensed driver at the School so I collect firewood with the students, collect cement and move it around the school yard, and go for provisions. I was even Mr. Harpt's personal chauffeur when the Isuzu broke its clutch and he had to be collected and brought back from Maun with the load. I am also busy organising the workshop and from first term, 2005, I will be teaching and training the kids to work with steel. They will be producing items from the curious to furniture, all of which is to be sold, with the profits going to the School to keep it functioning. This will also prepare the kids interested in steel work to either start their own small welding shop or to further their studies in this field at higher institutions. We also carry out repairs



The Man in Action

in the workshop and have already brought in money repairing aluminium boats and steel furniture. Production of aluminium boats will start in 2005 and orders can be made to Mr. Harpt on 72 437 948 or to me on 72 700018. The e-mail address is banabametsi@info.bw.

At this time Bana ba Metsi School would like to thank Kate Meehan for her pledge of P3000 for steel and Patrick Greene for his pledge of 25kg of welding rods for the production of steel goods to be made and sold.

I have been truly honoured to live and work amongst these under-privileged children, who are hungry to learn, both in the classroom and in the workshop.

*Dave Bodington
Diploma in Mechanical Engineering.*

Success as We See It

I have been asked to include some of our success stories by someone who, I think, found this Newsletter a bit too gloomy. Let me first point out that I intend to be honest whenever I write about the events of any given term. I don't think there is any point in painting a rosy picture of life at Bana ba Metsi School unless that is the way it went. I am assuming that those who support the School and donate funds want to know what is really happening, which is what I have always tried to do.

Be that as it may, this is as good a time as any to highlight some of the successes. Let me start with the fact that no student has ever died or been seriously injured while in our care. Considering the amount of malaria we have and the level of aggression some of the boys display when they arrive, death is always a remote possibility. As for injuries, the odd tooth has been dislodged by a brick, and a few wounds have been stitched up. We have also never had a strike or a riot, although I did have to calm the students down one evening in 2003. Whether any of this can be termed success or disaster limitation is debatable.

As for genuine success, let me start with our first group of 5 students who completed their studies here in 2001. Of these, one was a member of a violent gang in Maun when he came to us. He did not go on to secondary school, but the other day I saw him for the first time since he left and he looked very good. He was healthy and happy, he wasn't in jail, and when I asked him if he had gotten into any trouble he told me that he had left all of that behind and was doing well. Three other boys from that first group finished their junior secondary education in 2004 and one of these has been accepted to senior secondary school. This made me very happy since I have always considered the boy, Kanyetu, to be our first student after he broke into my house in Shakawe 4 months before I started Bana ba Metsi. He was with 2 adults who got jail sentences. When the police asked me what they should do with Kanyetu I told them to leave him and I would take him with me when I started my School. Less than half of those who complete junior secondary school in Botswana qualify to continue with senior secondary so we are all very proud of him, especially since at junior secondary he had been a prefect (student leader). From criminal to prefect. Not bad.

I often see Headmasters of secondary schools and ask how our boys are doing. More often than not they are very satisfied with them. I had to laugh when I heard that one secondary school had an emergency staff meeting the first day of the school year when they realised that 2 of our boys had been admitted. Ironically, they were two of the more well-behaved students we had. I have always been of the opinion that even those who don't do well here will eventually see the light later in their lives. There was proof of this when Atang's aunt came to collect his certificate. I wasn't satisfied with his behaviour when he left in 2003, but his aunt said that he was doing very well, attending secondary school and helping his mother at home.

The title of this section is *Success As We See It*. The "as we see it" was included because we don't necessarily feel a boy has to go on to secondary school to be successful. There have been 2 very good examples of this. The first one was a boy, Ngova, with a temper like I have never seen. I can't even count the number of times I had to grab him from behind when he was in the middle of a scrap with someone over a minor issue. It always took time to calm him down, after which he was willing to listen to what you had to say. He wanted to be a soldier, but these days you need a senior secondary education and he was, unfortunately, hopeless in class. About 3 months ago I found him in front of a spare parts shop in Maun, late in the afternoon. He had been hired as a security guard, complete with uniform, hand cuffs and billy club. You should have seen the smile on his face. I have no doubt he will do well. He's not a soldier, but looks a bit like one.

The second example is Goweditwe who wrote his national exam here in 2002. I suspect he originally left school because he was tired of being viewed as stupid. It's true, he can hardly add two numbers together, despite the fact that he tried as hard as any student in his class. But he can lay bricks as well as anyone, and you will be hard-pressed to keep up with his need to do more work. He did much of the work on my house and was always a step ahead of me. Not being a trained builder myself, I usually work without a plan and solve any problems as I go. But he was always eager to carry on before I had come up with the solutions. He is now employed full-time as a builder in Shakawe and loving every minute of it. The above photo is one of the walls he built in my house using glass bottles.



Focus on Funding

In terms of funding, during the third term we built on the success of the second term, "to keep the wolf from our door" (to borrow a term from Quill Hermans). Several very substantial donations came through, the money was deposited into the Moremogolo Trust account, and I was finally able to sleep right through the night.

I want to begin by thanking Gaogakwe Phorano, the Director of the Department of Culture and Youth. After corresponding with this government department for over a year, we approached him directly. He was sympathetic to our case for financial assistance and set the

process in motion, eventually coming up with P100,000. It was just what we needed. We were out of imminent danger and could consider buying a box of chalk rather than borrowing from the local primary school. Thank you Mr. Phorano.

Moving on, a group of successful and warm-hearted lawyers in Gaborone donated P39,000 for the construction of a recreation room. They set up Kabelano Trust some years ago to channel funds to worthy organisations. The nice thing about living in a small country is that everybody seems to know each other. As it turned out, the man I was supposed to meet to discuss the donation, Terrence Dambe, is the brother of my good friend Ollie's wife. How convenient. He turned out to be very approachable and we quickly agreed on how the donation would be disbursed. I am hopeful that is as close as I ever come to utilising the services of a lawyer. Great people, lawyers, but needing them usually means you have a problem. Terrence, please tell the guys I will be relieving them of the balance outstanding in the very near future. And don't forget your promise to visit the School. I'll give you all a swimming lesson in the Okavango River.

Following on a previous donation of P20,000 Prefsure Botswana contributed an additional P25,000. Thanks for this go to Mark Patton and Bruce Sinclair. Prefsure contributes a higher-than-average share of their profits to charity, according to those who know about these things. I would like to thank them for keeping us in mind when it was time to write the cheques. I always espouse the benefit of having friends when I talk to the boys, and this was generously demonstrated when Alan and Jenny Egner, old friends of mine, parted with P18,000 in October. They are like my Holiday Inn when I am in the capital city. I could tell you about Alan showing me how to cook squid and nearly burning the house down, but I won't. Thanks guys. Deloitte & Touche, the accounting firm, sent us a cheque for P6000. I would like to thank John Stevens for authorising that.

Just before Christmas we received what seems to be an annual donation from John and Rosemary Cox. They sent us another cheque for £200 which is much appreciated. We also received \$325 from Janet and Roger Harpt, who have contributed in the past, \$300 from my sister Sara and her husband Jon, \$200 from Elsa and Norman Rush who were the directors of Peace Corps in Botswana when I was a volunteer in the early 80's, \$100 from my grandmother's memorial fund and \$50 from my aunt, Jane Warren. Thanks to all of you for your assistance.

Those were the cash donations received between September and December, 2004. Every year we also receive what we call in-kind donations which we appreciate as much as money. Kingsley & Associates assisted us with the printing of a fold-out flyer which we have been using for fund raising purposes. I visited Karin Dobrowsky to discuss it and the conversation turned out to be quite short. "No problem", she said, after I explained what we needed. Her and Kingsley have helped us in the past and were with us from the start, supplying us with stationery and the printing of our receipt books. Thanks for your continuing support.

At Christmas time we received a present from Bertram Van Munster, who I have never met. He was in charge of the Botswana section of "The Amazing Race". When those involved packed up to leave the country there was a sizeable load of gear that had to be disposed of, torches, cool boxes, shade netting, electrical equipment, etc. Along with Bertram, I would

like to thank Mark Thomas and David Pryce for suggesting to Bertram that it be given to us. All boxed up it wouldn't fit into a pick-up. The next time you are in Botswana, let me know Bertram and I can meet you and thank you personally.

And finally, I would like to thank the Chairman of our Trust, Quill Hermans, for his efforts to dig us out of the financial quagmire we were in. He spent 5 days here at Bana ba Metsi in October helping me with the flyer and appeal letters. To those who have responded positively to the letters, our thoughts are with you. My offer to entertain and accommodate donors, past and potential, still stands.

And in Conclusion . . .

The boys and I have come up with what I feel will be quite an effective fund raising idea. I have recruited the four students pictured at the right. See how tough they look? The way it will work is, if you don't pop out some money . . . we're going to visit you!



Last night I went to bed hoping that I would wake up with enough inspiration to be able to finish this Newsletter. I have been within a hair's breadth of finishing for weeks, a blond hair at that. How time flies when you're having fun. Often when I meet my friend Derek Wilson he says, "so Steve, howzit going at the penal colony?" While that is a bit of an exaggeration, it does seem like one at times. It was a difficult year and maybe I unconsciously put it out of my mind, which was why I had trouble coming up with things to tell you. But, there is lots of good news in the next issue, so stay tuned.

Steven Harpt
Director.

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